#BLENDEDAI
BUILDING HUMAN/AI SYSTEMS

EPISODE 01

AN EXPERIMENT FOR A MILESTONE
36 STRATAGEMS

2025-04-21

CONCEPT

#BlendedAI

Why a mini-book on the 36 Stratagems and the #BlendedAI concept?

This book is a first experiment, to celebrate the 4,000,000th access to my online articles on **robertolofaro.com**

To summarize: designed a concept of what could do, selected as a case study 36 Stratagems, as I used already over a decade ago for my Chinese and Go learning activities, and went on.

The "went on" part implied designing a whole process that embedded human and models, and carry it out over a week-end.

Anyway, all across the process my role was mainly on the concepts, amendments to finalize the results of each step (even through multiple runs through each model), and finally assembling.

Both on the text and images for each stratagem resulting from the process my intervention was limited to editorial and altering graphical elements, but… left enough freedom to GenAI models to "create" based on my inputs.

36 STRATAGEMS

There are countless translations and adaptations, also for business purposes, of the original 36 Stratagems.

For this mini-book, the titles of each section and of each stratagem are using the English and Chinese transliterations provided on **Wikipedia**.

You can see in the front page a table listing all the sections.

Then, for each stratagem you will have a right-hand page with a picture (generated collaboratively human + AI + human)

Instead, the left-hand page contains a short story.

For the purpose of continuity, my text generation requests were all "framed" to focus on a specific context and time range.

Consider both the text and images as mnemonic tools- better than 400 pages of explanation to ease remembering the rationale (and potential use) of each stratagem.

Enjoy!

I
Winning Stratagems
(勝戰計, Shèng zhàn jì)

II
Enemy Dealing Stratagems
(敵戰計, Dí zhàn jì)

III
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(攻戰計, Gōng zhàn jì)

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(並戰計, Bìng zhàn jì)

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(敗戰計, Bài zhàn jì)

WINNING STRATAGEMS

In the Tang dynasty, General Tang Taizong sought to expand his empire by conquering a neighboring kingdom. However, the enemy's strong defenses and naval superiority made an open invasion impossible. Taizong devised a stratagem: "Deceive the heavens to cross the sea."

Taizong organized a grand pleasure cruise for himself and his troops under the guise of leisure and diplomacy. They set sail in a fleet of ornate ships, accompanied by musicians, dancers, and lavish supplies. The enemy kingdom saw this as nothing more than a gesture of friendship and goodwill, unaware that they were transporting an entire army right under their noses.

Upon reaching the enemy's shores, Taizong and his troops disembarked without raising suspicion. They swiftly marched inland, catching the enemy off guard. Their deception had worked; they had successfully crossed the sea while maintaining a facade of normalcy. The surprise attack led to a decisive victory for General Tang Taizong's forces and marked a turning point in his empire's expansion.

This story serves as an example of how one can use stratagems like "Deceive the heavens to cross the sea" to achieve ambitious goals while maintaining appearances, ensuring success even when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

WINNING STRATAGEMS

During the Warring States period, Qi was engaged in a bitter conflict with two powerful neighbors: Wèi and Zhào. Qi's forces were struggling to break through Wèi's defenses while Zhào faced an imminent siege by their combined armies.

Sun Bin, a renowned military strategist serving Qi, advised a different approach: "Besiege Wèi to rescue Zhào." He believed that targeting Wèi's capital would force them to divert resources and troops from the siege on Zhào.

Qi launched a surprise attack on Wèi's capital, catching their defenders off guard. The sudden threat compelled Wèi to withdraw forces from the siege on Zhào in order to protect their homeland. As a result, the pressure on Zhào was lifted, and Qi managed to relieve them without significant losses.

This strategic victory demonstrated how indirectly weakening an opponent could lead to unexpected advantages. Sun Bin's approach not only saved Zhào but also weakened Wèi, giving Qi a stronger negotiating position in the ongoing conflict. This story highlights the importance of adaptability and exploiting vulnerabilities when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

WINNING STRATAGEMS

During the late Eastern Han dynasty, Cao Cao rose to power amidst a time of chaos and warring states. To consolidate his position further, he employed the stratagem "Kill with a Borrowed Knife."

Cao Cao identified two rival warlords, Yuan Shāo and Gōngsun Zān, who were at odds over territorial claims. He secretly provided intelligence to each side about their opponent's weaknesses, encouraging them to launch attacks against one another. As the conflict escalated, both sides suffered significant losses and resources were depleted.

Meanwhile, Cao Cao maintained a facade of neutrality while strengthening his own forces. When Yuan Shāo and Gōngsun Zān were weakened from their mutual struggle, he intervened to "rescue" the defeated party. In return for protection, they pledged allegiance to him.

This story demonstrates how Cao Cao used the stratagem of "Kill with a Borrowed Knife."

By exploiting rivalries and manipulating information, he weakened his adversaries without direct confrontation, ultimately gaining power through their collapse. This tale serves as an example of how indirect action can lead to significant strategic advantages when faced with complex challenges.

WINNING STRATAGEMS

During the Warring States period, Qi and Wèi were locked in a bitter struggle for dominance. Qi's military strategist, Zhūgě Liàn, observed that Wèi was overextending its forces across multiple fronts. He advised waiting at leisure while the enemy labored (以逸待勞).

Qi retreated to their fortified capital and focused on strengthening defenses rather than engaging in direct confrontation. Meanwhile, Wèi committed more troops to campaigns against other states, believing Qi posed no immediate threat. However, they soon found themselves stretched thin and struggling with supply issues.

Zhūgě Liàn saw this as the opportune moment for action. He led a surprise attack on Wèi's weakened forces, catching them off guard. The swift and decisive strike resulted in a significant victory for Qi, which was able to conserve resources while allowing its enemy to expend their strength.

This story demonstrates the effectiveness of "Wait at Leisure While the Enemy Labors." By remaining patient and disciplined, Qi achieved a crucial military advantage by exploiting Wèi's overextension. This tale underscores the importance of strategic positioning and timing in achieving victory even when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

WINNING STRATAGEMS

During the Three Kingdoms period, warlord Lü Bu was a formidable warrior but faced internal strife within his own ranks. Meanwhile, Cao Cao saw an opportunity to exploit this vulnerability using the stratagem "Loot a Burning House."

Cao Cao bided his time as Lü Bu's forces weakened due to internal conflicts and power struggles. When the moment was right, he launched a surprise attack on their position. The element of surprise combined with Lü Bu's disarray allowed Cao Cao to achieve a decisive victory.

This story demonstrates how "Loot a Burning House" can be applied in various contexts. By exploiting an opponent's internal chaos, one can strike when they are least capable of defending themselves and ensure swift victory. However, this stratagem is ethically questionable and may damage long-term reputation or alliances.

WINNING STRATAGEMS

During the Eastern Zhou period, Sun Tzu was faced with a formidable enemy fortification at Chencang. To overcome this obstacle, he employed the stratagem "Make a Sound in the East, Then Strike in the West" (聲東擊西).

Sun Tzu ordered his troops to make loud noises and displays of force on one side of their position, leading the enemy to believe that was where they would strike. Meanwhile, he secretly positioned his forces for a surprise attack from the opposite direction. The enemy, deceived by the feint, focused their defenses on the wrong flank.

As soon as Sun Tzu's troops launched their real assault, they encountered minimal resistance and achieved a decisive victory. This story demonstrates how misdirection can be used to exploit an opponent's expectations and create opportunities for strategic advantage. However, it also highlights the importance of convincing feints and quick transitions in executing this stratagem effectively.

ENEMY DEALING STRATAGEMS

During the Warring States period, a military commander faced an enemy force that outnumbered his own. To overcome this disadvantage, he employed the stratagem "Create Something from Nothing" (无中生有).

The commander ordered his troops to feign weakness and retreat in disarray, leading the enemy into believing they had a numerical advantage. In reality, the retreat was carefully orchestrated, with soldiers maintaining formation while appearing chaotic. This deception lured the enemy into pursuing them, creating an opening for a surprise ambush.

When the enemy advanced, the commander's forces sprang their trap and achieved a decisive victory against what they had perceived as overwhelming odds. This story demonstrates how "Create Something from Nothing" can be used to manipulate perceptions and create opportunities in seemingly unfavorable situations. However, it also highlights the potential risks of discovery and loss of credibility if the deception is exposed.

ENEMY DEALING STRATAGEMS

During the Three Kingdoms period, strategist Zhuge Liang sought to weaken his powerful rival Shu's military strength. He employed the stratagem "Openly Repair the Gallery Roads, but Sneak Through the Passage of Chencang" (明修棧道，暗渡陳倉).

Zhuge Liang ordered his troops to publicly repair a key supply route, drawing the enemy's attention and resources. Meanwhile, he secretly led a smaller force through the less-guarded passage of Chencang. The enemy, focused on the apparent reinforcement operation, failed to detect Zhuge's real move until it was too late.

As his forces emerged from the passage of Chencang, they launched a surprise attack on the unsuspecting enemy rear. This caught them off guard and led to a decisive victory for Zhuge Liang. The story demonstrates how this stratagem can be used to divert attention and create opportunities by exploiting the enemy's focus on an apparent but less important operation, while executing a critical move in secret.

OPENLY REPAIR THE GALLERY ROADS, BUT SNEAK THROUGH THE PASSAGE OF CHENCANG - 08

ENEMY DEALING STRATAGEMS

During the Warring States period, several rival states were engaged in a long and costly conflict. The state of Qin employed the stratagem "Watch the Fires Burning Across the River" (隔岸觀火).

Qin's leaders observed the ongoing struggle from afar, waiting for an opportunity to intervene when their rivals were weakened and demoralized. As the conflict dragged on, resources dwindled, alliances shifted, and morale plummeted among the warring factions. Eventually, Qin saw its moment.

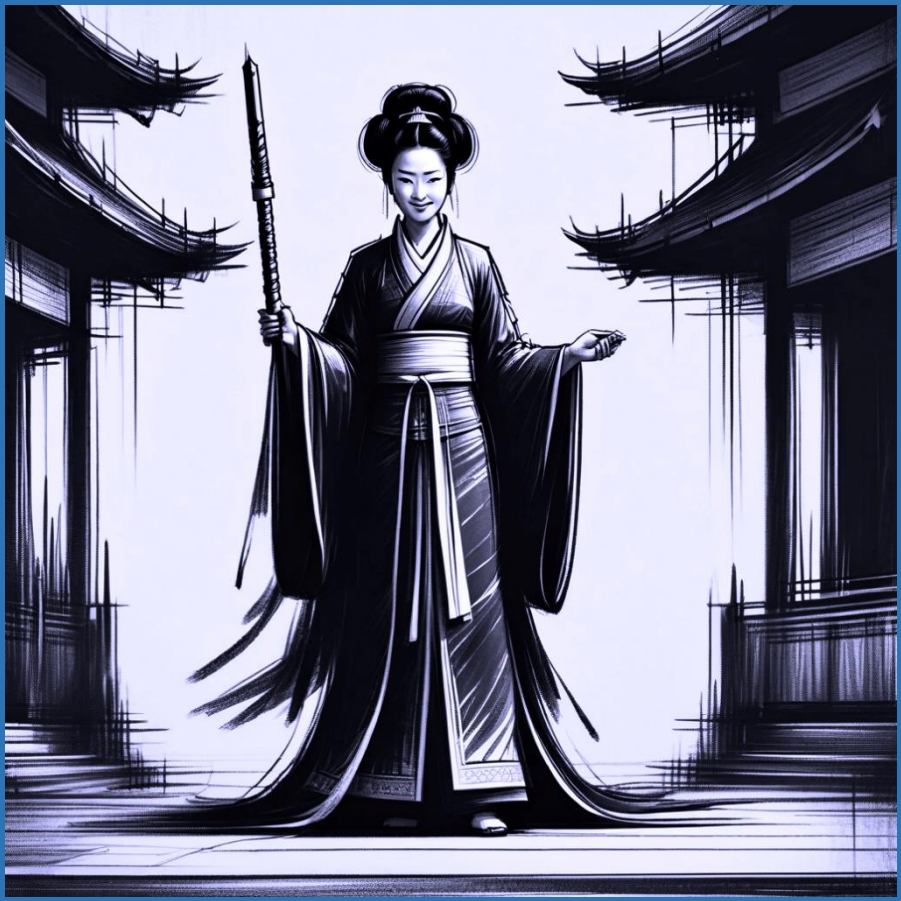
Qin stepped in with a decisive military campaign that caught the exhausted and disheartened rivals off guard. This intervention led to swift victories for Qin, which consolidated power and territories previously considered out of reach. The story demonstrates how "Watch the Fires Burning Across the River" can be used to exploit an opponent's internal strife and exhaustion, ensuring a decisive victory with minimal effort.

ENEMY DEALING STRATAGEMS

During the Three Kingdoms period, a cunning strategist formed an alliance with a rival state. He employed the stratagem "Hide a Knife Behind a Smile" (笑裏藏刀).

The strategist won over his new allies through friendly gestures and seemingly genuine cooperation. However, he secretly gathered intelligence on their strengths, weaknesses, and strategic plans. As trust grew between them, so did the strategist's understanding of how to exploit this alliance for his own benefit.

When the time was right, the strategist betrayed his former allies with a swift and unexpected attack. Caught off guard by the deception, they were unable to mount an effective defense against their once-trusted ally. The story demonstrates how "Hide a Knife Behind a Smile" can be used to exploit trust for strategic advantage, turning friend into foe when it serves one's interests best.



ENEMY DEALING STRATAGEMS

During the Warring States period, a state faced an imminent threat from multiple directions. To preserve its core territories and resources, it employed the stratagem "Sacrifice the Plum Tree to Preserve the Peach Tree" (李代桃僵).

The state's leaders decided to retreat from some smaller, less strategic positions along their borders. This allowed them to concentrate their forces on defending the more critical areas and ensuring overall survival. Although they lost these outposts, they managed to preserve their core strength for future battles.

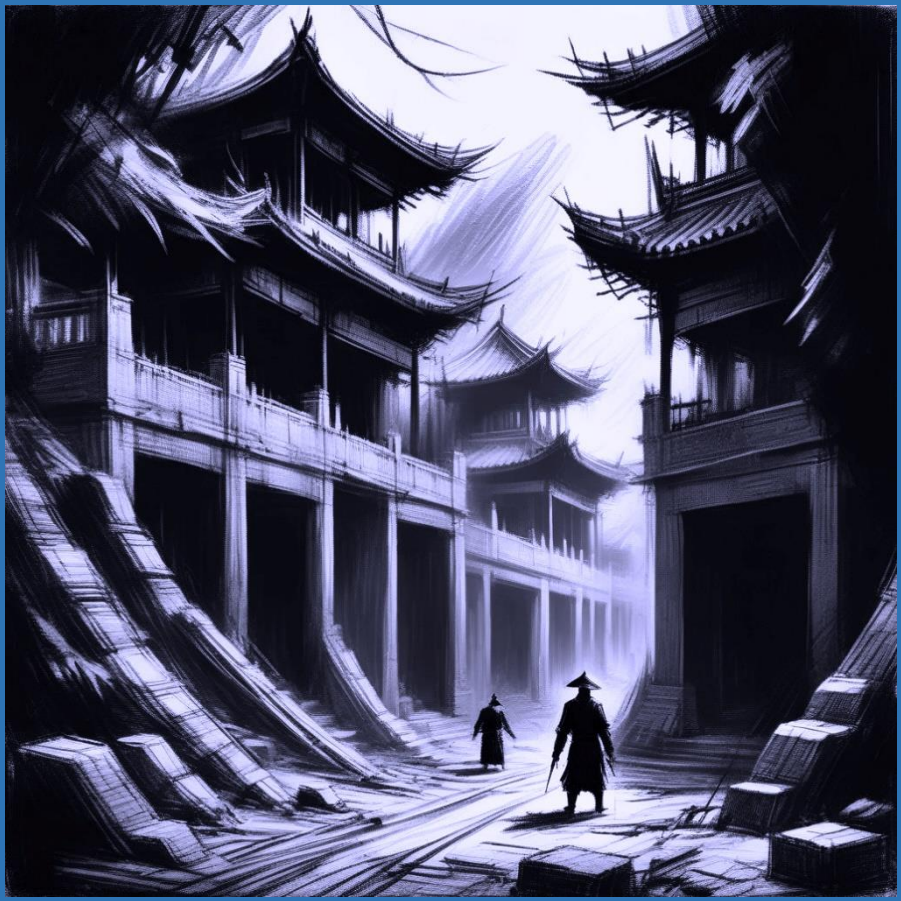
This decision proved wise as it enabled the state to weather the initial threat and regroup. Eventually, they were able to turn the tide of war in their favor by focusing on their long-term objectives. The story demonstrates how "Sacrifice the Plum Tree to Preserve the Peach Tree" can be used to prioritize strategic goals over short-term losses, ensuring greater stability and future success even at the cost of seemingly valuable assets.

ENEMY DEALING STRATAGEMS

During the Warring States period, a general led his forces in an important campaign to capture a strategic fortress. As they marched toward their objective, they noticed a herder tending to a goat by the roadside. Seizing this unexpected opportunity, the general ordered his troops to "Take the Opportunity to Pilfer a Goat" (順手牽羊).

The soldiers captured the animal without disrupting their main mission or diverting significant resources. Later, they discovered that the seemingly insignificant goat was actually carrying valuable intelligence for an enemy spy. By seizing this opportunity, the general gained crucial information and weakened his adversary's position without altering his primary objective.

This story demonstrates how "Take the Opportunity to Pilfer a Goat" can be used to exploit unexpected advantages while staying focused on one's main goal. By remaining alert and opportunistic, even seemingly minor benefits can contribute significantly to overall success.



OFFENSIVE STRATAGEMS

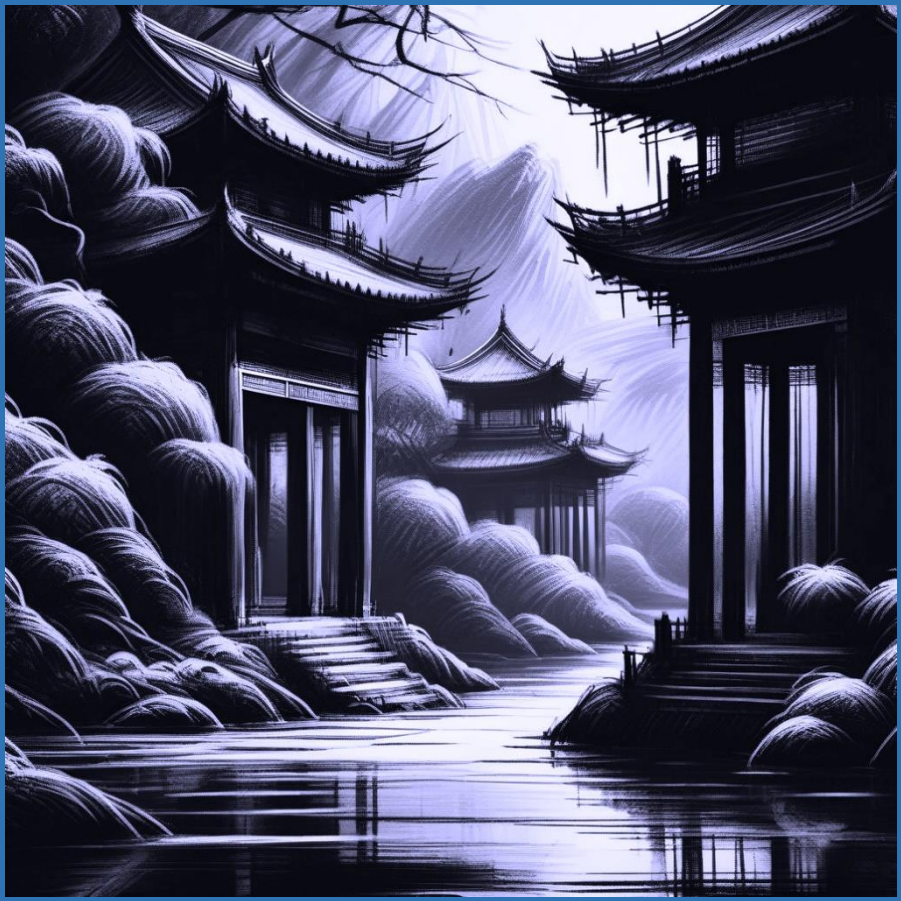
During the Warring States period, a cunning general named Zhuge Liang sought to weaken his enemy's forces. He devised a plan using the stratagem of "stomp the grass to scare the snake."

Zhuge Liang ordered his soldiers to create a small diversion in an area where he suspected the enemy was gathering intelligence. They pretended to be drunk and noisy, drawing attention away from their true objective - to observe the enemy's movements.

As expected, the enemy became curious about this unusual behavior. A group of scouts were sent to investigate, revealing their position in the process. Zhuge Liang seized this opportunity and launched a surprise attack on the exposed enemy forces. The enemy was caught off guard, leading to significant losses for them.

Zhuge Liang's strategy worked flawlessly as he had hoped. His enemies were forced to reveal their plans prematurely due to his unexpected move. This victory boosted Zhuge Liang's reputation and helped secure the future of his kingdom.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "stomp the grass to scare the snake" can be effectively used in times of conflict, providing valuable insights into an enemy's plans while minimizing one's own risks.



OFFENSIVE STRATAGEMS

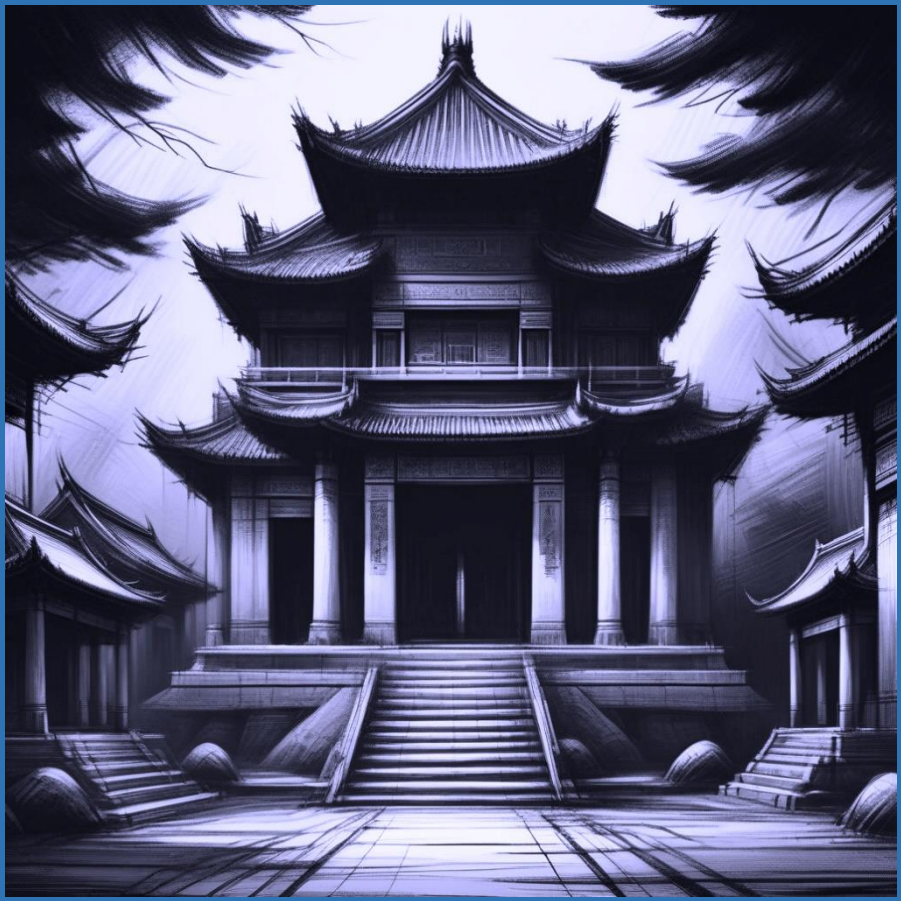
During the Unified Dynasties period, a brilliant inventor named Wu Qi stumbled upon an ancient text detailing forgotten technologies. Among them was a design for a powerful weapon that could change the course of warfare forever.

Wu Qi recognized the potential in this long-forgotten invention and set out to adapt it to suit his era's needs. He spent countless hours studying the original blueprints, making adjustments where necessary, and sourcing materials from local markets.

Finally, after months of tireless work, Wu Qi unveiled his updated version of the ancient weapon—a powerful cannon that could launch projectiles with devastating accuracy. The military leaders were skeptical at first but decided to give it a chance in battle.

In their next engagement against a formidable enemy, Wu Qi's invention proved its worth. The cannon decimated the enemy lines and forced them into retreat. This victory marked a turning point in the war, as the once-forgotten technology had been resurrected to serve a new purpose.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "borrow a corpse to resurrect the soul" can be effectively used even centuries later. By adapting old ideas or technologies for modern use, one can create significant impacts and transform the course of history.



OFFENSIVE STRATAGEMS

During the Unified Dynasties period, a small kingdom found itself threatened by a powerful neighboring empire. The enemy had fortified its position on high ground, making direct assault nearly impossible due to their strategic advantage.

The kingdom's wise strategist, Zhang Liang, devised a plan using the stratagem "lure the tiger down the mountain." He knew that the empire relied heavily on its vast resources and manpower, which were concentrated around the capital city.

Zhang Liang organized a feigned retreat, drawing the enemy forces away from their fortified position. The ruse worked; the enemy pursued, leaving their stronghold vulnerable. Seizing this opportunity, Zhang Liang's army launched a surprise attack on the now-exposed empire.

The battle was swift and decisive. With the enemy caught off guard, the small kingdom emerged victorious. Their opponent suffered significant losses, forcing them to negotiate peace terms favorable to the smaller kingdom.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "lure the tiger down the mountain" can be effectively used even in times of great power imbalances. By exploiting an enemy's reliance on a specific advantage and drawing them away from it, one can create opportunities for success against seemingly insurmountable odds.

OFFENSIVE STRATAGEMS

During the Unified Dynasties period, a bandit leader named Liang Qi had been terrorizing local villages for years. The government sent General Zhang He to capture him and restore peace in the region.

General Zhang He knew that Liang Qi was cunning and would not surrender easily. Using the stratagem "in order to capture, one must let loose," he devised a plan. His army set up camp near a river, leaving an apparent escape route open for Liang Qi's gang.

Liang Qi saw this as his chance to evade capture and possibly turn the tables on General Zhang He. He led his men in a daring nighttime raid through the seemingly open pathway. However, unbeknownst to him, General Zhang He had strategically placed his troops along the riverbanks, hidden from sight.

As Liang Qi and his gang crossed the river, they were swiftly surrounded by General Zhang He's forces. The bandit leader was captured without a fight, as he had been lured into a false sense of security with an illusion of freedom.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "in order to capture, one must let loose" can be effectively used in various contexts. By creating a temporary feeling of control or escape for your opponent, you can lower their defenses and ultimately achieve your objective without resistance.

OFFENSIVE STRATAGEMS

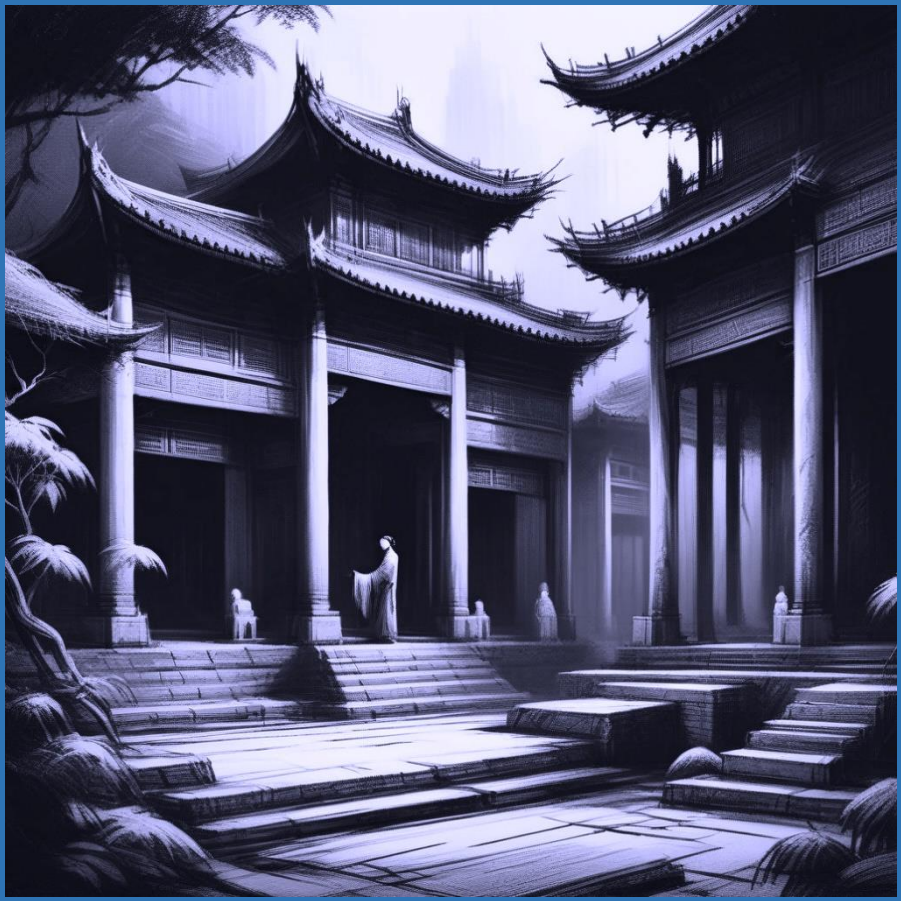
During the Unified Dynasties period, a skilled artisan named Zhang Xu was known for his exquisite jade carvings. One day, he received an anonymous letter containing a rough brick with a note that read: "Tossing Out a Brick to Lure a Jade Gem."

Intrigued by the message and its reference to the stratagem, Zhang Xu decided to follow up on this lead. He traveled to the location mentioned in the letter and found an old temple with a jade carving hidden within its walls. The carving was exquisite but had been damaged over time.

Zhang Xu offered his services to restore the damaged jade gem, promising that he would do so at no cost if allowed to study it closely. In return, he hoped to learn from this masterpiece and gain a reputation for restoring priceless artifacts.

The temple's caretakers were hesitant but ultimately agreed due to Zhang Xu's impressive portfolio and the promise of his work being free. After carefully studying and repairing the jade gem, Zhang Xu gained invaluable knowledge that propelled him into fame as a master artisan.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "tossing out a brick to lure a jade gem" can be effectively used even centuries later. By offering something seemingly insignificant (in this case, his services for free), Zhang Xu was able to acquire valuable knowledge and recognition that would have been difficult to obtain otherwise.



OFFENSIVE STRATAGEMS

During the Unified Dynasties period, a powerful warlord named Zhang Xi had an army of loyal soldiers who followed him without question. His leadership was based on deep bonds and mutual respect rather than fear or coercion.

The neighboring kingdom saw this as their opportunity to weaken Zhang Xi's forces. They launched a surprise attack, capturing Zhang Xi in the heat of battle. Believing that his capture would lead to the disbandment of his army, they celebrated their supposed victory.

However, the opposite occurred. The soldiers, driven by loyalty and grief over their fallen leader, swore revenge against the neighboring kingdom. They rallied under a new commander and launched a counterattack, which ultimately led to the defeat of the enemy forces.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "defeat the enemy by capturing their chief" can have unintended consequences when applied without understanding the nature of the leader's influence over their followers. In this case, Zhang Xi's capture did not lead to disbandment but instead fueled a fierce and successful counterattack driven by loyalty and revenge.

MIXED WARFARE STRATAGEMS

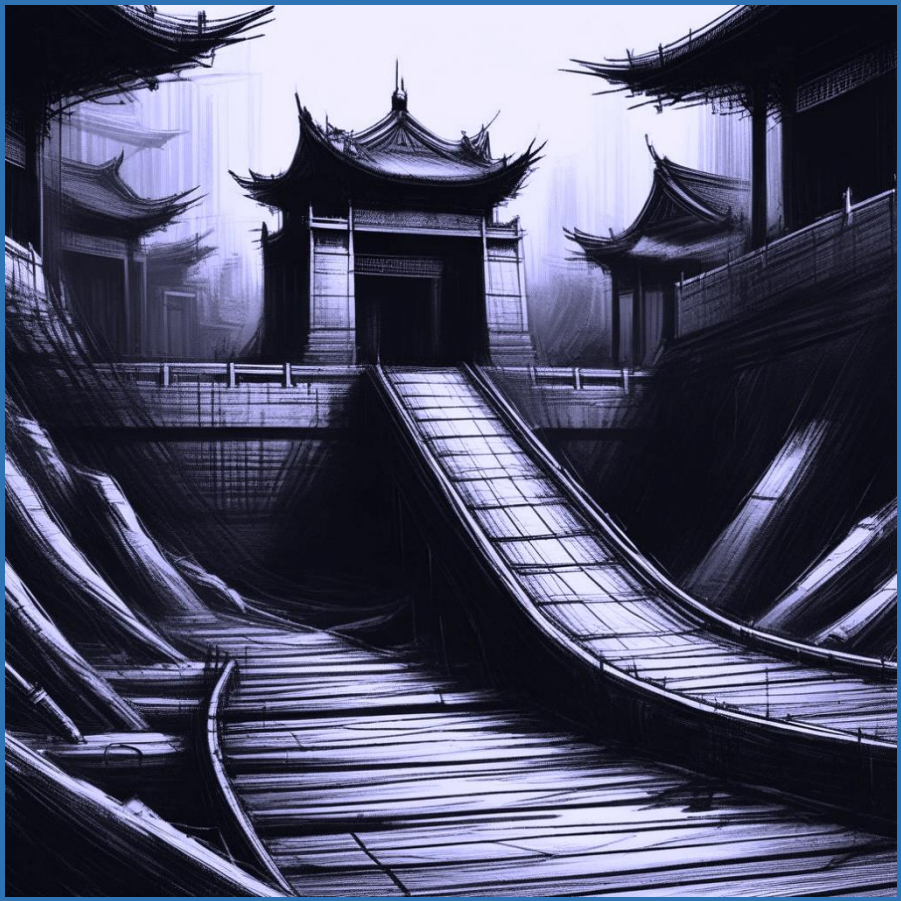
During the Unified Dynasties period, a small kingdom faced an imminent threat from a powerful neighboring empire. The enemy had amassed a vast army at their border and was preparing for invasion.

The wise strategist of the small kingdom, Zhang Liang, realized that direct confrontation would be disastrous. Instead, he decided to apply the stratagem "remove the firewood from under the pot." He targeted the empire's supply lines, cutting off their access to food and resources in the region.

Zhang Liang's forces launched surprise attacks on the enemy's logistics, destroying storage facilities and disrupting transportation routes. The neighboring empire was left without essential supplies for its army, forcing them into a difficult decision: retreat or risk starvation.

The empire retreated, unable to sustain their invasion due to Zhang Liang's strategic disruption of their supply lines. This victory preserved the small kingdom's independence and demonstrated the power of attacking an enemy's foundational resources rather than engaging in direct combat.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "remove the firewood from under the pot" can be effectively used even centuries later. By targeting the source of the opponent's strength, you can force them into a position where they cannot sustain their efforts without directly confronting them.



MIXED WARFARE STRATAGEMS

During the Unified Dynasties period, a cunning merchant named Zhang He saw an opportunity to expand his business. The neighboring kingdom was embroiled in internal conflict, causing chaos and confusion among its leaders.

Zhang He decided to apply the stratagem "disturb the water and catch a fish." He used this moment of disarray to negotiate favorable trade agreements with several factions within the kingdom. While they were preoccupied with their power struggle, Zhang He's business flourished, as he was able to operate without competition or interference.

As the internal conflict escalated and the neighboring kingdom became increasingly unstable, Zhang He continued to capitalize on the chaos. His influence grew, and eventually, he managed to establish a strong foothold in the market. The once-powerful kingdom became dependent on his goods and services.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "disturb the water and catch a fish" can be effectively used even centuries later. By creating confusion or chaos within an opponent's ranks, you can exploit their vulnerability to advance your own interests without facing resistance.

MIXED WARFARE STRATAGEMS

During the Unified Dynasties period, a small kingdom faced an imminent threat from a powerful neighboring empire. The enemy had amassed a vast army at their border and was preparing for invasion.

The wise strategist of the small kingdom, Zhang Liang, realized that direct confrontation would be disastrous. Instead, he decided to apply the stratagem "slough off the cicada's golden shell." He disguised his forces as farmers or travelers, blending into their surroundings and avoiding detection by the enemy.

As they retreated towards a strategic border point, Zhang Liang's forces created diversions and false signals to confuse the pursuing empire. The enemy was led away from the true escape route, allowing the small kingdom's army to safely withdraw without being detected or captured.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "slough off the cicada's golden shell" can be effectively used even centuries later. By disguising oneself or one's intentions, you can evade a stronger opponent and create opportunities for escape or regrouping. This tactic requires careful planning and execution to avoid detection while maintaining an air of ambiguity until the right moment.

MIXED WARFARE STRATAGEMS

During the Unified Dynasties period, a small kingdom faced an imminent threat from a powerful neighboring empire. The enemy had amassed a vast army at their border and was preparing for invasion.

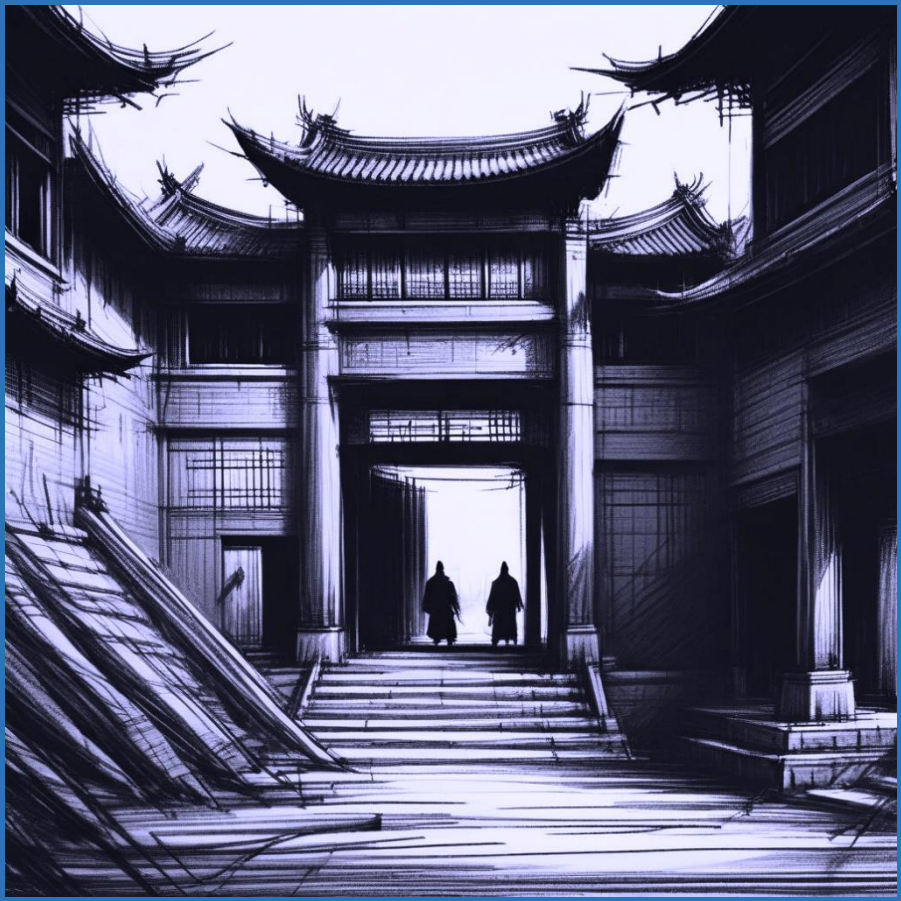
The wise strategist of the small kingdom, Zhang Liang, applied the stratagem "shut the door to catch the thief." He first secured all escape routes and blocked any potential reinforcements or assistance from reaching the enemy forces. The empire's movements were monitored closely, ensuring that they had no means of retreat or regrouping.

When the moment was right, Zhang Liang's army launched a decisive attack on the enemy position, with no chance for escape or reinforcement. The small kingdom emerged victorious without resistance. Their opponent suffered significant losses and surrendered without resisting.

This story demonstrates how the stratagem "shut the door to catch the thief" can be effectively used even centuries later. By securing the environment before striking, you eliminate the enemy's ability to escape or call for help, ultimately leading to their defeat without resistance.

Limitations: If the enemy is aware that they are being manipulated or trapped, they may attempt a surprise counterattack or feign surrender as a ruse. It also requires precise timing and knowledge of the enemy's actions to avoid backfiring.

In essence, By blocking all potential escape routes or sources of assistance for the enemy, you can create an opportunity for success against them without resistance.



MIXED WARFARE STRATAGEMS

During the Warring States period in Ancient China, the State of Qin employed a strategic approach to expand its territory and power. They focused on forming alliances with distant states like Yan and Zhao while targeting neighboring states such as Wei for conquest.

The King of Qin sent envoys to establish diplomatic relations with the distant states, offering trade and mutual defense pacts in exchange for their loyalty. Meanwhile, he ordered his generals to focus on conquering nearby territories like Wei, where logistical advantages were strong.

As Qin's power grew, so did its network of alliances. The King maintained these relationships by sending gifts and delegations to show goodwill and respect. In return, the distant states provided valuable resources and intelligence that helped Qin in their conquests.

However, maintaining these alliances was not without challenges. Occasionally, disputes arose between Qin and its allies, requiring diplomatic negotiations to resolve. But through skillful negotiation and compromise, Qin managed to keep the peace with its distant partners while continuing to expand its territory.

In time, Qin's strategy proved successful as it became one of the most powerful states in Ancient China. Its ability to balance conquest with diplomacy allowed it to grow stronger without overextending its resources or provoking unnecessary conflict.

BEFRIEND A DISTANT STATE AND STRIKE A NEIGHBOURING ONE - 23

MIXED WARFARE STRATAGEMS

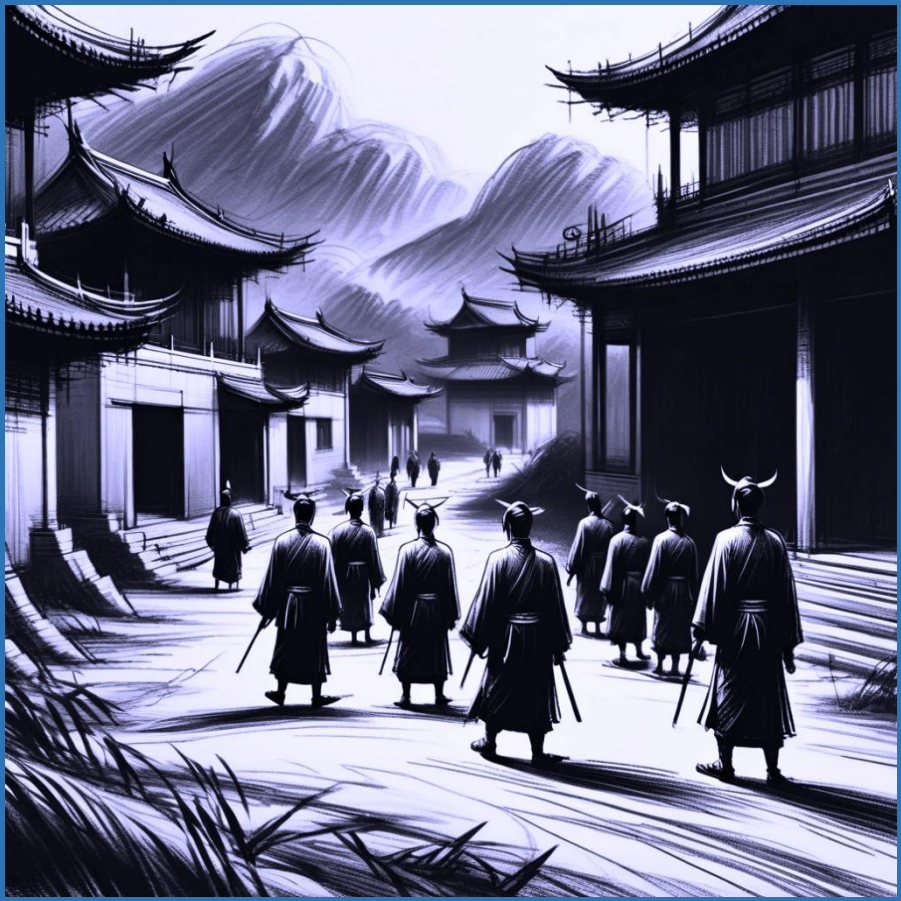
During the Warring States period in Ancient China, a powerful state known as Qi formed an alliance with its neighboring state, Yan. Their shared goal was to defeat their common enemy, the State of Guo, which had been causing havoc and instability in the region for years.

Qi provided military support and strategic advice to Yan while they jointly planned their attack on Guo. As expected, the combined forces of Qi and Yan proved too strong for the State of Guo, who was eventually defeated. With Guo vanquished, Qi turned its attention towards Yan, now that it had access to their territory and resources.

Qi's King saw this as an opportunity to expand his own kingdom at the expense of his former ally. He ordered a surprise attack on Yan, catching them off guard and taking control of their land and resources. The betrayal was swift and brutal, leaving Yan in disarray and Qi in a stronger position than ever before.

This act of deception not only allowed Qi to expand its territory but also sent a clear message to other neighboring states about the consequences of forming alliances with them. In the end, the King of Qi had successfully used his alliance with Yan as a means to defeat their common enemy and then turn on them for his own gain.

OBTAIN SAFE PASSAGE TO CONQUER THE STATE OF GUO - 24



COMBINED STRATAGEMS

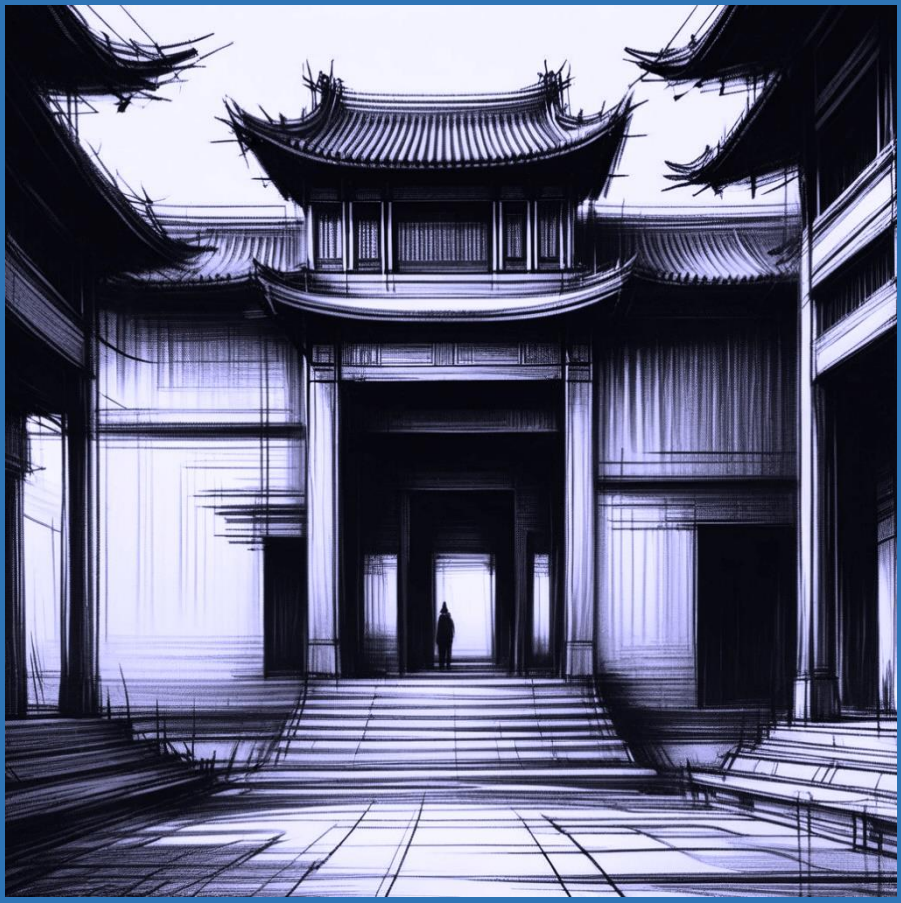
During the unified dynasties period in Ancient China, a powerful kingdom known as Qin sought to weaken its neighboring rival, Chu. The King of Qin realized that Chu's strength lay in their vast network of spies and informants who provided crucial intelligence for their military operations.

Qin devised a plan to replace the key elements within Chu's spy network by introducing agents with conflicting loyalties or false information. These new recruits would undermine Chu's ability to gather accurate intelligence, creating confusion among their leadership and weakening their overall strength.

The King of Qin ordered his spies to infiltrate the ranks of Chu's spy network by posing as trusted allies or disgruntled former agents seeking redemption. They were tasked with spreading misinformation, discrediting reliable sources, and creating divisions within Chu's intelligence community.

As Qin's plan unfolded, the once-reliable information provided by Chu's spy network became increasingly unreliable. Their leadership was left guessing as their military operations faltered due to a lack of accurate intelligence. Meanwhile, Qin continued to strengthen its own forces and prepared for an eventual confrontation with Chu.

In the end, Qin successfully replaced the "beams" that held Chu's spy network together with rotten timbers, leaving them vulnerable and easy prey when the time came for direct conflict. The King of Qin had effectively undermined his rival without engaging in open warfare, demonstrating the power of subtlety and strategic planning.



COMBINED STRATAGEMS

During the unified dynasties period in Ancient China, a powerful emperor ruled over his vast empire with wisdom and fairness. However, there were whispers of corruption within his court, as some officials sought to enrich themselves at the expense of their people.

The emperor, aware that direct confrontation could lead to further unrest or rebellion, decided to use the stratagem "point at the mulberry tree while cursing the locust tree." He began using indirect language in his speeches and edicts, making references to common issues without explicitly naming any individuals.

One day, during a court session, he said, "It is unfortunate that some among us have allowed their greed to overshadow their duty to serve the people. Like locusts devouring crops, they leave nothing but destruction in their wake." The message was clear: corruption would not be tolerated, and those who engaged in it were being watched closely.

The targeted officials, aware that they had been indirectly accused of wrongdoing, could not defend themselves without further incriminating themselves or revealing the extent of their misdeeds. As a result, many chose to mend their ways and focus on serving the empire more diligently. The emperor's subtle approach allowed him to address corruption within his court without sparking open rebellion or creating unnecessary chaos.

POINT AT THE MULBERRY TREE
WHILE CURSING THE LOCUST TREE - 26

COMBINED STRATAGEMS

During the unified dynasties period in Ancient China, a small village found itself under threat from a powerful warlord who sought to conquer their lands. The villagers were outnumbered and outmatched by the warlord's forces but refused to surrender without a fight.

The village elder, wise beyond his years, devised a plan that involved feigning madness while keeping his balance. He began acting erratically in public, shouting nonsensical phrases and making bizarre decisions. The villagers spread word of the elder's supposed insanity throughout neighboring villages, creating an illusion of weakness to deter potential allies from joining forces with them against the warlord.

The warlord, believing that the village was too weak to pose a threat, underestimated their resolve and sent only a small contingent of his troops to conquer them. However, on the night before the battle, the elder revealed his true plan: he had secretly trained every villager in guerrilla tactics and fortified their homes with hidden traps.

When the warlord's forces arrived, they were met with a fierce resistance that far exceeded their expectations. The village held strong against the invaders, ultimately driving them away defeated. By feigning madness but keeping his balance, the elder had deceived both the neighboring villages and the powerful warlord, allowing him to protect his people without being overwhelmed by superior forces.

COMBINED STRATAGEMS

During the unified dynasties period in Ancient China, a cunning bandit leader named Zhang Qian sought to expand his territory and power. He found an opportunity when a neighboring kingdom faced internal strife, dividing its people between two rival factions vying for control of the throne.

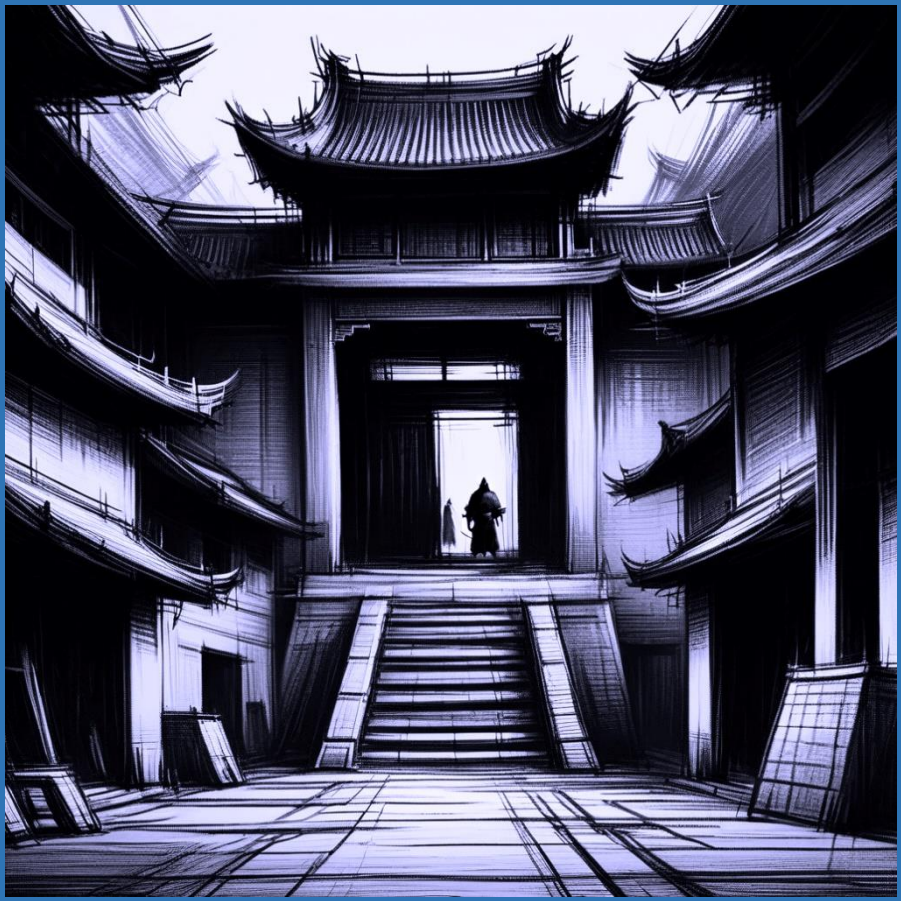
Zhang Qian saw this as the perfect moment to strike. He infiltrated the weaker faction with his own forces, posing as loyal soldiers and advisors. They quickly gained influence within the faction, providing strategic advice that helped them gain ground against their rivals. However, Zhang Qian had a hidden agenda: he planned to remove all escape routes once they were firmly in control of the kingdom.

As the rival faction grew weaker, Zhang Qian's forces consolidated their power and influence within it. They cut off diplomatic ties with neighboring nations, making any potential allies wary of getting involved. Finally, when the rival faction was at its strongest, Zhang Qian revealed his true intentions: he had no plans to share power or resources but intended to conquer them outright.

The trapped faction, now fully committed and with nowhere else to turn, fought valiantly against Zhang Qian's forces. However, their defeat was inevitable due to the lack of escape routes and alliances. In the end, Zhang Qian successfully expanded his territory and power by using this stratagem—removing the ladder when the enemy had ascended to the roof.

REMOVE THE LADDER

WHEN THE ENEMY HAS ASCENDED TO THE ROOF - 28



COMBINED STRATAGEMS

During the unified dynasties period in ancient China, a small village found itself under threat from a neighboring warlord. The villagers were outnumbered and lacked the resources to defend themselves effectively. Desperate for a solution, they turned to their wise elder, who suggested using the "Decorate the Tree with False Blossoms" stratagem.

The elder instructed the village's blacksmith to create life-sized wooden soldiers, which were painted and decorated to resemble real warriors. The villagers then placed these fake soldiers around their perimeter walls, making it appear as if they had a much larger force guarding them.

When the warlord arrived with his army, he was surprised by the apparent strength of the village's defenses. Fearing an unequal battle and potential losses, he decided to negotiate for peace instead. The villagers agreed to pay tribute to the warlord in exchange for leaving them unharmed.

The wise elder had successfully used deception to create a powerful illusion that saved their village from destruction. By using the "Decorate the Tree with False Blossoms" stratagem, they managed to manipulate the perception of their enemy and secure their safety without engaging in direct conflict. This story demonstrates how this ancient Chinese strategy can be applied creatively in various situations to achieve desired outcomes through deception and illusion.

COMBINED STRATAGEMS

During the reign of Emperor Wu, a cunning strategist named Zhuge Liang served as his prime minister. One day, an ambitious general named Dong Yun sought to usurp the leadership within the kingdom's military ranks. He began by feigning loyalty and presenting himself as a subordinate officer under General Xu, who commanded one of the key divisions.

Dong Yun carefully observed his superiors, learning their strengths and weaknesses while building alliances with other officers. Over time, he gained influence within the division, proving indispensable in several military campaigns. His reputation grew, earning him the trust of both his fellow soldiers and higher-ranking officials.

When General Xu fell ill, Dong Yun seized the opportunity to assume command. He quickly proved himself a capable leader, winning battles and expanding the kingdom's territory. Realizing that he could not maintain his facade indefinitely, Dong Yun approached Emperor Wu with his achievements and requested an audience.

Impressed by Dong Yun's accomplishments, Emperor Wu promoted him to a higher rank within the military hierarchy. However, Zhuge Liang, wary of potential threats to the kingdom's stability, devised a plan to test Dong Yun's loyalty. He fabricated an order from the emperor that contradicted one of Dong Yun's recent decisions.

Dong Yun faced a dilemma: follow his own decision or obey the emperor's apparent command. Realizing Zhuge Liang's trap, he chose to honor the emperor's wishes and informed his troops accordingly. Impressed by his loyalty and integrity, Emperor Wu rewarded Dong Yun further, solidifying his position within the kingdom's military leadership.

DEFEAT STRATAGEMS

During the reign of Emperor Wu, a cunning strategist named Zhuge Liang sought to weaken a rival kingdom. He learned that their young and impressionable prince was easily swayed by beauty and charm. So, he devised a plan using the stratagem of The Beauty Trap (Honeypot).

Zhuge Liang sent a beautiful courtesan named Xiao Qing to infiltrate the rival kingdom's court undercover as one of their noblewomen. Her task was to seduce and manipulate the prince, causing internal strife within his ranks. As she gained access to the royal palace, Xiao Qing quickly caught the eye of the young prince.

She used her charm and beauty to gain his trust and influence over him. Soon enough, rumors spread throughout the kingdom about their secret trysts and growing affection for each other. The queen, already jealous of her husband's attention, became increasingly suspicious of Xiao Qing's true intentions.

As tensions rose within the royal family, the rival kingdom was plunged into chaos. The prince's focus shifted from his duties to his illicit relationship with Xiao Qing. Meanwhile, Zhuge Liang exploited this distraction by launching a surprise attack on their borders. Caught off guard and weakened by internal strife, the enemy forces were quickly defeated.

In this story, The Beauty Trap (Honeypot) was used to weaken an enemy kingdom through manipulation of emotions like lust and jealousy. By exploiting personal desires and social dynamics, Zhuge Liang created a breakdown in unity, trust, and focus within the rival court, ultimately leading to their downfall.

DEFEAT STRATAGEMS

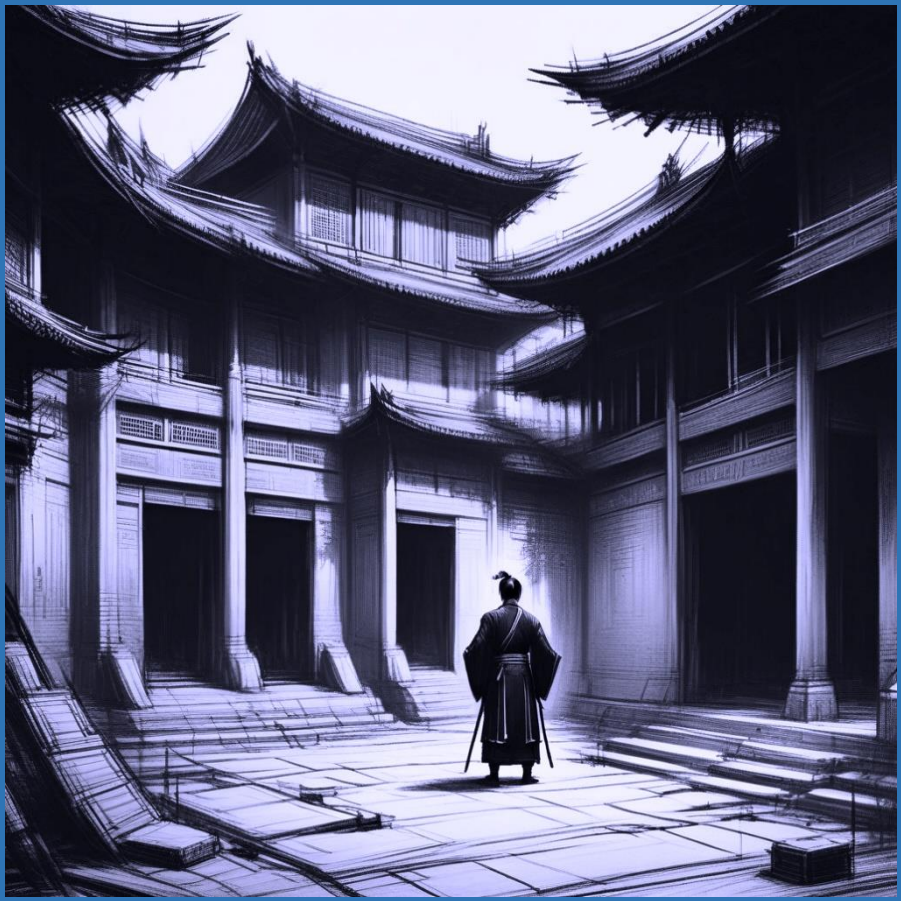
During the reign of Emperor Wu, a fierce nomadic tribe led by their cunning chieftain threatened to invade the southern borders. The emperor's army was vastly outnumbered and ill-prepared for battle. However, his chief strategist Zhuge Liang devised an ingenious plan using the Empty Fort Strategy.

Zhuge Liang ordered his soldiers to fortify a small, seemingly insignificant village on the border. They set up camps and supplies as if preparing for battle but kept their true strength hidden. The chieftain of the nomadic tribe, underestimating the emperor's forces, saw this as an opportunity to take the village easily.

Zhuge Liang's men maintained a calm and confident demeanor despite being outnumbered. They acted as if they were well-prepared for battle, even when the nomadic tribe began their assault. The chieftain, suspecting a trap but also fearful of underestimating his enemy, hesitated to commit fully to the attack.

Meanwhile, Zhuge Liang secretly gathered reinforcements and prepared counter-strategies. As days passed, the nomadic tribe's patience wore thin, and they eventually retreated. The emperor's forces had won without a single battle being fought.

In this story, the Empty Fort Strategy was used to deceive an enemy into believing they were walking into a trap when none existed. By appearing confident and composed despite being vastly outnumbered, Zhuge Liang made the nomadic chieftain hesitant and ultimately caused them to retreat. This stratagem exploited fear, overthinking, and the tendency of enemies to avoid risk, particularly when they perceive a threat that may not be there.



DEFEAT STRATAGEMS

During the reign of Emperor Wu, a powerful neighboring kingdom threatened to invade. The emperor's spymaster, Zhang Yi, devised a plan using the stratagem Let the Enemy's Own Spy Sow Discord in the Enemy Camp.

Zhang Yi discovered that the enemy kingdom had an internal power struggle between their general and advisors. He decided to exploit this division by secretly feeding false information to each faction, making them believe they were being undermined by the other. The spymaster planted rumors of betrayal and conspiracy within both camps, sowing seeds of doubt and mistrust.

As tensions rose between the general and his advisors, their focus shifted from preparing for war against Emperor Wu to dealing with internal disputes. They began accusing each other of treason and disloyalty, causing chaos in their ranks. Meanwhile, Zhang Yi gathered intelligence on their weakened state.

When the enemy kingdom finally launched an attack, they were unprepared and disorganized due to the discord sown by Zhang Yi's manipulations. The emperor's forces, well-informed about the enemy's vulnerabilities, easily defeated them in battle.

In this story, Let the Enemy's Own Spy Sow Discord in the Enemy Camp (反間計) was used to exploit an existing power struggle within a rival kingdom by spreading misinformation and creating internal discord. By diverting their attention from external threats to infighting, Zhang Yi weakened his enemy's ability to mount a successful defense or counterattack, ultimately leading to the kingdom's defeat.

LET THE ENEMY'S OWN SPY SOW DISCORD IN THE ENEMY CAMP - 33

DEFEAT STRATAGEMS

During the reign of Emperor Wu, a powerful neighboring kingdom threatened to invade. The emperor's spymaster, Zhang Yi, noticed that their general had recently suffered an injury in battle against another rival kingdom. Seizing this opportunity, he devised a plan using the stratagem Inflict Injury on Oneself to Win the Enemy's Trust (苦肉計).

Zhang Yi pretended to suffer a similar injury as the general, making it appear that both their armies had been weakened. He sent messengers to the enemy kingdom, offering condolences and suggesting they join forces against their common adversary. The enemy general, believing Zhang Yi was also injured and vulnerable, saw this alliance as an opportunity to regroup and strengthen his position.

As both sides focused on fighting their shared enemy, Zhang Yi secretly gathered intelligence and prepared for a surprise attack once the enemy's guard was down. Meanwhile, the general became more trusting of Zhang Yi, sharing battle plans and strategies under the guise of unity against their common foe.

When the time was right, Emperor Wu launched his attack while the enemy general was still distracted by the other rival kingdom. Caught off guard, the enemy's forces were quickly defeated.

In this story, Inflict Injury on Oneself to Win the Enemy's Trust (苦肉計) was used by pretending to be injured like their general, creating a false sense of vulnerability and gaining trust from the enemy kingdom. By exploiting the opportunity provided by the shared injury, Zhang Yi gained intelligence, regrouped his forces, and ultimately defeated the rival kingdom.

DEFEAT STRATAGEMS

During a time of war, Emperor Wu's general Zhao Yun faced an enemy fortress with seemingly impenetrable walls. Realizing that a direct assault would fail, he devised a chain stratagem (連環計) to overcome the defenses.

Firstly, Zhao Yun sent spies into the city undercover as merchants. They gathered intelligence on the enemy's strength and weaknesses while spreading rumors of internal strife within their ranks. This would weaken morale and create doubt among the defenders.

Next, he ordered his archers to launch a barrage of arrows at the fortress walls during nightfall. The noise from this attack would cover up the sound of secret tunnels being dug by his soldiers under the enemy's stronghold.

Once the tunnel was complete, Zhao Yun and his elite troops infiltrated the city through the hidden passageway. They caused chaos inside the fortress, creating a diversion that allowed his main army to launch a surprise attack from outside. The confusion within the fortress made it easier for them to seize control.

If this initial assault failed, Zhao Yun had planned a third strategy: his soldiers would retreat back into their own territory while feigning defeat. This would lure the enemy out of their stronghold and into an open battlefield where they could be defeated more easily.

In this story, chain stratagems (連環計) were used to overcome a seemingly impenetrable fortress by combining multiple tactics: spreading rumors, launching a diversionary attack, infiltrating the city through hidden tunnels, and causing chaos within its walls. By linking these strategies together, Zhao Yun was able to successfully defeat his enemy despite their strong defenses.

DEFEAT STRATAGEMS

During the reign of Emperor Wu, a powerful ruler in ancient China, his kingdom faced an imminent threat from neighboring tribes. The emperor's general, Zhuge Liang, was tasked with defending their borders but found himself outnumbered and facing certain defeat.

As the enemy forces closed in, General Zhuge Liang knew that standing ground would lead to catastrophic losses for his troops. Heeding the wisdom of the "If All Else Fails, Retreat" stratagem, he ordered a strategic withdrawal. His soldiers retreated methodically, covering their wounded and ensuring no one was left behind.

As they moved deeper into friendly territory, Zhuge Liang began to regroup his forces and devise a new plan of attack. He took advantage of the enemy's overconfidence in their pursuit and lured them into an ambush. The surprise attack caught the enemy off guard, resulting in significant losses for the pursuing tribe.

Emboldened by this victory, Zhuge Liang continued to use his wits and strategy to keep the kingdom safe from further threats. His wise decision to retreat when faced with defeat proved crucial in preserving his troops' strength and ultimately led to future successes on the battlefield.

This story highlights how the "If All Else Fails, Retreat" stratagem can be a powerful tool for survival and eventual triumph. By recognizing when it is best to withdraw and regroup, one can preserve resources and plan for future opportunities, as demonstrated by General Zhuge Liang's clever tactics during the unified dynasties period in ancient China.